Big-Hearted Fidel

It may be that the milk of human kindness has infused the veins of Fidel Castro, but the pure humanitarianism of his gesture on political refugees remains a bit suspect. His offer to allow Cubans with relatives in the United States to leave the country should perhaps be judged against a similar practice in Communist East Germany. Although most East Germans are effectively confined within the borders, elderly persons with relatives in West Germany have been encouraged to leave as part of a deliberate policy of reducing welfare and pension costs. This is straining the quality of mercy with a barbed-wire screen.

In Castro's case, the granting of exit permission for persons who wish to go to the United States could serve a double purpose of eliminating any welfare burden and of draining off opposition to his regime. This lends credence to Castro's offer, for it would be a cheap means of getting rid of malcontents. Whatever his motives, this country ought to welcome any genuine Cuban refugees who seek haven here. The United States ought to be careful, however, not to encourage possibly illusory hopes among the refugees of early return to a non-Communist Cuba. It would be far better to facilitate their integration into American life so that they do not constitute new communities of embittered exiles.